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ON PAGE 4

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Inside Washington

Media Intervene In "Contras" Debate

During the week immediately preceding the critical Senate vote to shelve President Reagan's request for \$21 million in aid to the "Contras" in Nicaragua, the media focused a curious amount of attention on the charges leveled by former CIA analyst David C. MacMichael that the Administration has "no proof" that the Sandinistas are funnelling arms, ammunition and direction to the guerrillas in El Salvador.

Leading the pack was the *New York Times*, which promoted MacMichael as a man "in from the cold and hot for the truth." In the *Times* article, MacMichael accused the Administration of fabricating Sandinista complicity to bolster support for its anti-Communist posture in Central America.

"The whole picture that the Administration has presented of Salvadoran insurgent operations being planned, directed and supplied from Nicaragua is simply not true," MacMichael said. "... The Administration and the CIA have systematically misrepresented Nicaraguan involvement in the supply of arms to Salvadoran guerrillas to justify its efforts to overthrow the Nicaragua Government."

Within two days of the *Times* article, two of the three major networks had MacMichael on the air, and the *Washington Post*, following suit, featured his charges on the front page.

Both CIA director William Casey and Secretary of State George Shultz immediately dismissed MacMichael's charges, with Shultz telling 50 reporters over a two-hour lunch that the "evidence is everywhere" on the Sandinistas. But the *Post*, finding it nowhere, bolstered MacMichael's claim, insisting:

"Neither Shultz nor Casey provided evidence to refute MacMichael's challenge. The State Department, which has been asked repeatedly to make public its evidence that illicit arms are flowing, has not provided such information."

John M. Goshko, a *Post* reporter who co-wrote the article, told HUMAN EVENTS that the Administration's assertions "have been a continuing source of controversy since President Reagan took office, and the Administration has not, over the past three years, responded to those who... don't

believe these charges or to those who say they want to see proof to document it."

Goshko said, "Our position is, given past experience going back to the Vietnam War, that you don't necessarily take things on faith." If the Administration refuses to make public CIA documentation, Goshko said, "then they have to face the consequences of the fact that... a large body of people in this country do not believe their contentions and are not convinced."

Goshko's position is untenable, however. Our intelligence community—precisely because it doesn't want to reveal to the enemy the sources we rely on and our methods of obtaining information—must not be required to "go public" with its evidence.

The intelligence community is not a judge unto itself, moreover. It must convince Congress — through both the Senate and House intelligence panels — that it possesses convincing evidence. And the evidence it has repeatedly laid out before those two panels has persuaded even those liberals who vigorously oppose the Administration's Central American policies that the Sandinistas play a critical role in El Salvador's insurgency.

Thus the House Intelligence Committee—chaired by Rep. Edward Boland (D.-Mass.), who opposes aid to the "Contras"—stressed in a report issued last May: "A major portion of the arms and other material sent by Cuba and other Communist countries to the Salvadoran insurgents transits Nicaragua with the permission and assistance of the Sandinistas."

"The Salvadoran insurgents rely on the use of sites in Nicaragua, some of which are located in Managua itself, for communications, command-and-control, and for the logistics to conduct their financial, material and propaganda activities. The Sandinista leadership sanctions and directly facilitates all the above functions."

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D.-N.Y.), a vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence panel, entered this considered statement on Sandinista support for the insurgents on March 29 of this year—just three months ago.

"What the House Intelligence Committee stated last May is in our judgment still true: [The insurgency in El Salvador] depends for its life-blood—arms, ammunition, financing, logistics, and command-and-control facilities—upon outside assistance from Nicaragua and Cuba." He also